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Schools of the Future; The Great School Debate

Susan Day Harmison
Kansas State University

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BOOK REVIEWS

Schools of the Future: How American Business and Education Can Cooperate to Save Our Schools, by Marvin Cetron with Barbara Soriano and Margaret E. Gayle, McGraw-Hill, 1985, \$12.95.

At a time when organizations, commissions, foundations and specially appointed task forces are carefully scrutinizing the state of America's public school systems, Dr. Marvin Cetron, with the assistance of Barbara Soriano and Margaret E. Gayle, is casting a critical eye toward the future. **Schools of the Future: How American Business and Education Can Cooperate to Save Our Schools** is the result of a study sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators and conducted by Forecasting, International, Ltd., of which Cetron is president.

In his futuristic overview of education in the 21st century, Cetron envisions a high-tech instructional regime in which computers and cable television in the classroom will play a major role. Ideally, computer software would be written by teachers in an effort to support and expand the prescribed curriculum and would be individualized to meet the educational needs of students at various stages of learning. The authors assert these disks would be easier and less expensive to update than traditional textbooks and would enable students to learn at home as well as in the school environment.

Also anticipated is an active and cohesive partnership between schools and business in which the latter would advise schools concerning the ever-changing career market of the technological industry. As the result of this newly formed alliance, schools of the future would provide career training for students commencing as early as eighth grade. Part of this training would likely take place within a business and would afford the student the opportunity to utilize skills currently being taught in the classroom. Performance would be observed and analyzed by an on-location trainer or by means of telecommunications equipment installed in the workplace. To further incorporate job training skills into the classroom, it is proposed that industry and business not only supply personnel to teach in the public schools on a full-time or part-time basis, but that they support education with equipment and funds.

Career training would not exclude the post-school-aged citizenry; training and retraining programs would be conducted in the school during evening and nighttime hours in an effort to keep workers abreast of the ever-changing technological industry.

Cetron further proposes to incorporate a community service facet into the burgeoning responsibilities of the school system by introducing video libraries, counseling centers and/or recreational centers to aid those families facing stress situations.

The authors of this book, like a multitude of other educational theorists, are concerned with "fixing" the American public school system. While their goal—a return to educational excellence in which the United States again assumes the role of technological leader—is sound, their proposed computer-based panacea may well fall short of its

projected mark. What education needs is not another experimental program devised to save our schools, but a careful, although thorough, weeding out of existing programs. It is the belief of this reviewer that our public school systems would serve our students best by teaching them to think, reason, analyze and evaluate and leave the computer sciences and job training skills to colleges, universities and vocational training institutions.

—by Susan Day Harmison

The Great School Debate: Which Way for American Education? Edited by Beatrice and Ronald Gross, Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1985 Hardback \$17.95, Paper \$9.95

American education is under the microscope and the entire nation is peering down the lens. Questions concerning every facet of education are being asked by educators, administrators, parents, concerned citizens, business leaders, government officials at local, state and federal levels and, yes, even students themselves.

How is American education faring under such close observation? According to the plethora of studies conducted in recent years, not well.

The Great School Debate was ushered in with the National Commission on Excellence in Education report of April 1983, **A Nation at Risk**. Spearheaded by Secretary of Education T. H. Bell, the report highlighted an overwhelming state of mediocrity which was crippling this nation's schools. Amid an outcry for immediate educational reform, commissions, task forces and concerned agencies from every conceivable sector began their own in-depth analyses of American education in an effort to pinpoint when and how education began its course of non-success, who or what was responsible for the decline of excellence and what action should be taken to remedy the efficacy.

The Great School Debate: Which Way for American Education is a compilation of 64 of the nearly 400 reports on education written since April 1983. Edited by Beatrice and Ronald Gross, this anthology serves as an expansive study of current educational theory, debate and recommendation.

The reports are divided into nine categories, the first beginning appropriately with **A Nation at Risk**. Following is a summary of eight other nationally sponsored reports which include Ernest L. Boyer's **High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America**, a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching-sponsored study and **A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future**, by John I. Goodland.

Subsequent selections offer provocative observations and proposals concerning virtually every segment of academia as well as national responses to the Great Debate and governmental concerns regarding funding.

Although no anthology can adequately detail and summarize all that has been written in the last three years concerning the state of public education, Beatrice and Ronald Gross have presented a collection of perhaps the most persuasive, controversial and authoritative reports. Their text is an excellent source of reference for anyone interested in the current status of American education.

—by Susan Day Harmison